



Democratic memory and far-right: study of Instagram messages from candidates and parties in Italy and Spain

Memoria democrática y ultraderecha: estudio de los mensajes en Instagram de candidatos y partidos en Italia y España

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: social networks have become a refuge for the transmission of messages – often highly emotional – that the populist extreme right transmits about the issues they include in the agenda setting. Democratic memory that deals with tragic events and victims and their reparation related to fascist or dictatorial regimes is one of these highly sensitive topics. Methodology: a full year has been analyzed, between 01/09/2022 and 31/08/2023, of publications related to democratic memory on Instagram accounts linked to far-right candidates and parties in Italy and Spain. By implementing a Likert scale, the use of the different discursive strategies that defined these messages was coded, as well as their level of engagement. Results: the first conclusion points to a greater use of content related to memory that is made in the Italian accounts compared to the Spanish ones, conditioned by the different political situation that exists in the two countries. Regarding the strategies detected, the use of disorientation and the attack on the opposition stands out, as well as the comparison of the crimes of fascism with those committed by radical left groups. Discussion: the findings complement other studies referring to the proliferation of these far-right options that have spread throughout different countries in both Europe and other continents. Conclusions: the Italian far-right uses more than Spanish one the resource of memory in its Instagram messages, but it usually does so in response to accusations from the opposition, within a strategy of hiding its affiliation with fascism and the cult of Mussolini.

Keywords Far-right; Instagram; Democratic memory; Political manipulation.

RESUMEN

Introducción: las redes sociales se han convertido en refugio para la transmisión de los mensajes –en muchas ocasiones altamente emotivos– que la extrema derecha populista transmite sobre los temas que incluye en su *agenda setting*. La memoria democrática que trata los sucesos luctuosos y sobre las víctimas y su reparación relacionados con los regímenes fascistas o dictatoriales, es uno de estos temas altamente sensibles. **Metodología:** se ha analizado un año completo, entre el 01/09/2022 y 31/08/2023 de las publicaciones relacionadas con la memoria democrática en cuentas de Instagram vinculadas a candidatos y partidos de extrema derecha en Italia y España. Mediante una escala Likert se ha codificado el empleo de las diferentes estrategias discursivas que definían esos mensajes, así como su nivel de *engagement*. **Resultados:** la primera conclusión apunta a una utilización mayor del contenido relacionado con la memoria que se efectúa en las cuentas italianas respecto a las españolas, condicionada por la diferente situación política que se da en los dos países. En cuanto a las estrategias detectadas, destaca la utilización de la desorientación y el ataque a la oposición, así como la equiparación de los crímenes del fascismo con los cometidos por grupos de izquierdas radicales. **Discusión:** los hallazgos complementan otros estudios referidos a la proliferación de estas opciones de ultraderecha que se han extendido por diferentes países tanto de Europa como de otros continentes. **Conclusiones:** la ultraderecha italiana utiliza más que la española el recurso de la memoria en sus mensajes de Instagram, pero lo hace habitualmente como respuesta a las acusaciones de la oposición, dentro de una estrategia de ocultación de su filiación con el fascismo y el culto a Mussolini.

Palabras clave: Ultraderecha; Instagram; Memoria democrática; Manipulación política.

1. Introduction

1.1. Social networks, populist and far-right strategies

Social networks have become an unavoidable forum for political players, which on the one hand reflect their activity and the media agenda choices they want to convey, but sometimes they simply have no choice but to use them after the interpellations to which they have to respond, adopting an active attitude conditioned by the response to the attack messages of their political enemies. The successful use of social networks in the political sphere has its origin in the triumph of Barack Obama in the 2008 US presidential election (Barberá and Cambra, 2018). A sophisticated package of online tools based on social network technologies, on the message and on involving his followers in his success, contributed to achieving the goal of placing Obama in the White House and changed the way of doing politics in the United States. In 2016, Donald Trump took proper note, detected the target to address, listened to his voters and set up an online campaign to deliver political information messages to them. Since the elections of that year that brought Trump to the presidency, and the Brexit referendum that took place in the United Kingdom around the same time, a techno-pessimism regarding social networks has spread, to which several authors have made reference. Their role as a factor of polarization and destabilization of democratic countries is noted with concern (Crilley and Gillespie, 2019; Iosifidis and Wheeler, 2018). Also Benkler et al. claim that these two political events marked an epistemic crisis in contemporary democratic societies (2018). After that moment, campaigns based on Fake News-the word of the year in 2016 according to the Oxford dictionary- became frequent, profusely used by the American Alt Right and by other movements ascribed to the flourishing new far-right at a universal level. It is worth recalling -to add confusion to the communicative scenario- that candidate Trump used this term to describe any news critical of his policies, at a time when trust in the news media declined in an extensive range of countries around the world (Benkler et al., 2018).

In recent years, concepts have emerged to shape the approach to the study of networks and political communication, such as the algorithmic phenomenon coined by internet activist Eli Pariser of Filter Bubble, which leads you to see content that reinforces your views to encourage engagement (2011), or homophily, a well-known phenomenon in sociology that causes people in social groups to tend to cluster around similar

interests, including politics (McPherson et al., 2001). The term post-truth has also emerged, as an approximate synonym of lie, where there is a predominance of emotional logic in their speeches (Lorusso, 2018). The greater the proactivity in the political use of social networks the greater the emotional expression towards political leaders manifested by citizens, with special attention to negative emotions such as anger and fear. These terms are added to others such as echo chambers (Sunstein, 2007) that amplify the debates that take place in them, in a sort of "emotional spiral" (Rivera et al., 2021). All this while considering that social networks are essential for the existence and development of current social movements (Castells, 2009).

The organizations belonging to the family of extreme right-wing parties move and express themselves with ease and are comfortable in these new spaces of political communication, emphasizing, moreover, the importance of including affective and/or emotional components in the messages elaborated for them, which serve to gain an audience and to build a sense of community (Burriss et al., 2000). Moreover, with this use of social networks to communicate with their sympathizers, they manage to avoid the mediatization of the traditional media, which they accuse of bias-remember Donald Trump's twisted interpretation of fake news-. Self-mediatization is an aspect highly valued by activists and a key element of their communication strategies, as it offers great possibilities for exercising counter-power (Casero-Ripollés, 2015). The dissemination of objectionable materials is one of the main strategies of populist right-wing or Alt-Right digital activism (Bennett and Livingston, 2018; Chadwick and Vaccari, 2019; Freelon et al., 2020; Guess et al., 2019; Marwick and Lewis, 2017). The messages that arrive via networks through disinformation strategies are predominantly visual and audiovisual, although their truth-destabilizing value is usually generated by text editing, which demonstrates the importance of multimodality when creating this type of content (Gamir-Ríos et al., 2021). Sánchez-Castillo and López-Olano also warn about the predominance of audiovisual formats in which the addition of text to images is a basic tool of manipulation mechanisms. This combination allows for "personalized fake news" in which the senders of the messages modify them sufficiently to take the images out of context, creating multimodal disinformation (2021).

1.2. Memory and the far-right in Italy and Spain

Historical memory is a highly politicized concept, in which events that occurred more than eighty years ago are capable of generating controversy and polarization in networks such as Twitter (López-Olano et al., 2022). The study by Gamir-Ríos and Lava-Santos shows the full consolidation of democratic memory as a subject of disinformation, and the fact that disinformation on this issue deals more with aspects of the present than the past shows that it is not so much used to review history as to polarize about the reality of the moment (2022). In multiple and disparate places in Europe or America there is an explosion of the memorial phenomenon that multiplies in all fields, such as that of commemorations and memorial days, and that bears fruit in the incessant opening of new museums dedicated, for example, to the Jewish Holocaust (Violi, 2014). Time is not an obstacle to remembrance, but has guaranteed a safe distance from what was too painful. It is necessary to have an impact on the emotional concept that is associated with the past, with the mournful events that occurred linked to repressive regimes. As Fredric Jameson points out: history is what hurts (2002).

Umberto Eco said that there was only one Nazism, but fascism can be played in many ways, and it always has to be called the same: fascism (2017). It could also come back, but no one will lean out on a balcony saying: "I want the black shirts to parade again in Italian squares". The truth is that a party that clearly sinks its roots in fascism, Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), governs in coalition in the transalpine country since 2022, thanks to the support of Matteo Salvini's Lega - also attached to the populist far right - and of the controversial and now defunct communication magnate Silvio Berlusconi. Giorgia Meloni is now the president of the Council of Ministers. She herself narrates in her successful memoirs her affiliation to Fronte della Gioventù as if she had joined an innocent youth organization (2021), and not the youth faction of a neo-fascist party like the Movimento Sociale Italiano, founded in 1946 by former members of the Republic of Salò. As it also happens in other countries, Meloni and his party habitually deny their relations with fascists and claim to belong to the center right, although in an interview made years ago- but which is easily accessible by Youtube- he recognized Benito

"Discourse consisting of altering or falsifying, in order to minimize the facts and take away their historical importance."

Mussolini as a great statesman¹. Moreover, beyond Fratelli's leader, Ignazio La Russa, one of the party's founders- who has become president of the Senate, the second most important position in the country- had no qualms years ago to show on television his house in which several sculptures with the figure of the Duce² were displayed. The motto of his party is *Dio, Patria, Famiglia*, the triad created by the nineteenth-

century activist Giuseppe Mazzini, but which was used during fascism as a slogan of the regime. The fondness for the far-right ideology is obvious, but so is the strategy of concealment that they adopt, and with which they have managed to come to power in Italy. Meloni herself qualifies the philo-fascist sympathy of herself and her co-religionists as "nostalgic folklore", which she states without qualms that it carried a very negative part implicitly, since it served to play into the hands of their adversaries. "We fought it, because we know that with nostalgia we would never have built anything" (p. 53, 2021). Meloni also recounts in her memoirs the strong impression she got when visiting the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem, the Yad Vashem, and to vindicate her support for the Jews she curiously quotes the blackshirt Giorgio Perlasca, who was a fascist volunteer with the rebel troops in the Spanish Civil War and who later pretended to be the Spanish consul in Budapest to save thousands of Jews. This duality seems to render it appealing to the intended ideology of the FdI. The strategy coincides in its objectives with what Mario Panico denounces as the sweetened resemantization of the past that constitutes the gear of an engineering of memory in Italy, which feeds the development of new codes that normalize the memory of Mussolini as a statesman, father of the family, or as an object of souvenirs (2020).

The local version of a populist far-right party in Spain within the universal phenomenon of the rise of these political options is Vox, led by Santiago Abascal. The ultra-conservative option has just turned 10 years old, and is integrated in the Party of European Conservatives and Reformists, presided precisely by Giorgia Meloni, so its parallelism is obvious. In spite of the good results they obtained in some autonomous regions such as the Valencian Community or Murcia in the 2023 elections, and which made them enter into several coalition governments together with the Popular Party, in the General Elections of the same year their votes dropped significantly, losing 19 deputies compared to their best result obtained in the previous call with 52 representatives in Parliament. Therefore, the political situation in Spain and Italy is disparate: while in Italy they have triumphed and managed to set up the first far-right government after World War II, in Spain their political responsibility is still limited. Patriotic values are one of the main populist discursive lines (Engesser et al., 2017), something that in Spain is closely linked to the revisionism of the democratic memory that is gaining great interest as a subject object of disinformation (López-Olano et al., 2022). Just as in Italy there is a past referring to fascism with which Fratelli is related, those of Vox also have their moral referent in Franco's Dictatorship. The strategy is similar to that of Meloni's: although theoretically they publicly deny their alignment with fascist postulates, Abascal said that those who defend Franco's work have a place in Vox, and the party's vice-president Javier Ortega Smith defended that in the Dictatorship there were elections and the Regime always won, or that the "Thirteen Roses were women who tortured vilely"³. They branded the law 20/2022 of October 19 of Democratic Memory that replaces the one of Historical Memory of 2007 as partial and totalitarian, and described the extraction of Franco's remains from the valley of Cuelgamuros as a desecration. Some recent studies have analyzed controversies in social networks related to the treatment by the Spanish far right of the figure of the poet Federico García Lorca, whom they claimed as "of all" not only of the left (Velasco-Molpeceres et al., 2022). The dichotomy- at least in appearance- and the dissociated personality with respect to his identity close to the dictatorial regime is maintained over time and reaches the present day: recently, the second deputy mayor of Valencia, Juan Manuel Badenas stated with respect to the rallies at the PSOE headquarters in protest of the amnesty that being a Nazi was not a crime, and that thought never commits a crime. Quickly, the Vox politician qualified his own words, defining himself as a great defender of the Spanish Constitution⁴.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuoXr-zjqas> [visit: 1/11/23]

² <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/88YXTJJzwo> [visit: 1/11/23]

³ <https://www.elmundo.es/madrid/2019/10/04/5d9717f6fdddf190a8b4636.html> [visit: 1/11/23]

⁴ <https://www.europapress.es/comunitat-valenciana/noticia-badenas-vox-ser-nazi-no-delito-20231109111833.html> [visit: 4/11/23]

2. Objectives

The general objective of this research aims to detect the most effective discursive strategies in Instagram to achieve the viralization of the memory messages of far-right parties in Italy and Spain, taking into account the deep tradition of historicist reformulation that these parties and their leaders manifest. As a consequence this general objective, the narrative strategies employed in the far-right discourses by the parties and leaders being considered will be detected.

The five research questions raised are the following:

- RQ1: Is the discourse on democratic memory more recurrent on Instagram accounts associated with the Italian or Spanish far right?
- RQ2: On which Instagram profiles is more content about democratic memory posted, on institutional ones or on those of political leaders?
- RQ3: What discursive strategy on democratic memory is the one most employed by far-right parties and leaders in Italy and Spain?
- RQ4: Which Instagram accounts of political parties or far-right leaders show greater communicative effectiveness around democratic memory?
- RQ5: Are historicist iconography and the use of the image of leaders common resources in publications on democratic memory in the Instagram accounts of the far right?

3. Methodology

The media agenda of the new extreme right-wing political options in Spain and Italy, protected within democratic societies, is limited to a few issues, but always with high social tension. Within this reduced list, issues related to the so-called democratic memory stand out, referred in Spain to the institutional crimes committed during the Franco dictatorship, but in other countries it is found as a similar phenomenon referred to the historical idiosyncrasy that frames various regimes of oppression and violent repression, fascist, Nazi or dictatorial, as in the case of Italy.

To answer the five questions posed, the Instagram profiles of political parties and candidates were analyzed in the time span of one year between 01/09/2022 and 31/08/2023, obtaining 142 publications. As for Italy, an analysis was carried out on the political profile of Giorgia Meloni, from October 2022 President of the Italian Council of Ministers <https://www.instagram.com/giorgiameloni/>, the profile of Ignazio La Russa, president of the senate and co-founder of the ultras Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) together with Giorgia Meloni <https://www.instagram.com/ignazio.larussa/> and the official account of the party Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) <https://www.instagram.com/fratelliditalia/>. As for Spain, an analysis was carried out on the political profile of Santiago Abascal, deputy for Madrid in the 14th legislature of the Spanish Parliament, current national president of the Vox political party since 2014 https://www.instagram.com/santi_abascal/, Javier Ortega Smith, current vice president of the party and also deputy <https://www.instagram.com/javierortegasmith/> and finally the official profile of Vox https://www.instagram.com/vox_es/. It should be born in mind that, in that gap year, general elections took place first in Italy, where the coalition led by Fratelli and including Matteo Salvini's League and Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, won with more than 44% of the votes in Congress and the Senate, thus fulfilling the forecast of the polls (InfoData, 2022). Thus, the period of analysis also includes the election campaign periods, both in Italy and Spain, which methodologically brings the two media environments closer, although despite the effort to equalize the conditions of the analysis in the political situations of the two countries in which we consider there are obvious parallels, it is obvious that the circumstances of both extreme parties are different with respect to their presence in government, and therefore in their visibility in social networks and their ability to get their messages across, something that we will take into account when explaining and analyzing the content.

For the design of this research, descriptive variables have been considered, used when the research focuses on describing or representing the variables that are being measured. And these have been achieved from an inductive and deductive perspective (Cheng et al, 2009), in any case ensuring that the variables can be measured, observed, evaluated or inferred, i.e. that data can be obtained from them. As Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) point out, there are two possible approaches to content analysis of news frames: inductive and deductive. The first one is to study small samples with an open vision in order to try to reveal the range of possible frames. The second consists of predefining the frames as content analytical variables to check to what extent they occur in the news or publications. Specifically, for this research, a total of 17 inductive variables were considered that could answer the research questions. These were coded with 30% of the published posts, 11 of these being discarded due to redundancy or ineffectiveness. Subsequently, from a deductive perspective, the remaining 6 variables were coded, obtaining the descriptive data that provide answers to the posed research questions".

By means of an inductive approach, the possible variables were considered, from an open point of view, of those that would possibly be decisive in defining the messages on democratic memory. Finally, and after viewing all the posts published by the six Instagram accounts indicated, those that did not appear, were redundant or lacked decisive information were eliminated, finally obtaining a list of six variables. These verified variables are:

"Disorientation" (D). Discourse as a disorientation strategy, e.g., answering accusations of being philo-fascist without ever stating the content of the attack.

"Attack on the opposition" (AO). Consideration of historical memory as a tool for attacking the opposition.

"Historicist whitening" (HW). Equalization of the crimes of one side and the other, historicist whitening. The "and you more".

"Fascism_francoism crimes" (FC). Equating the events that took place during the Spanish Dictatorship and Civil War, or the Fascist Trentenium and World War II, with crimes of radical or pro-independence political groups, especially in the 80s/90s: ETA and GRAPO in the case of Spain, Red Brigades and international communism in the case of Italy.

"Denial" (DE). Discourse of denial of history: the crimes claimed by memory did not happen and are an invention of the radical left.

"Misrepresentation of History" (MH). Discourse consisting of altering or falsifying, in order to minimize the facts and take away their historical importance.

These six variables have been coded under a Likert scale: (1-5)

1. Nothing;
2. Something;
3. Neutral;
4. A lot;
5. Totally.

The codebook also contemplated the variables date, number of Likes, number of comments and whether or not the leader appears in the published post, and the use or not of historical images.

All variables have been subjected to a descriptive process in order to obtain the distribution of frequencies, total numbers, statistics of positioning and central trend, in addition to a bivariate analysis of X2 hypothesis contrast to confirm the null hypothesis (H0) or alternative (H1), in short, their level of association or correlation. To

ensure the internal consistency of the process, 30% (n=43) of the units of analysis were subjected to an external interrater process. The statistical procedure was performed with SPSS_IBM v.26.0.0.

4. Results

First, the results of the interrater test, which had not been involved in the initial coding, point to a robust internal reliability. According to Cohen's Kappa (k) reliability index and percent agreement, the results yield an average agreement for "Disorientation (D)" of 0.83 and Cohen's Kappa index(κ)= .790; for "Attack on the Opposition (AO)" of 0.87 and (κ)= .838; for "Historicist Whitening (HW)" 0.798 and (κ)= .746; for "Fascism_francoism crimes (FC)" of 0.81 and (κ)= .876; for "Denial (DE)" of 0.82 and (κ)= .803; and finally for "Misrepresentation of History (MH)" of 0.88 and (κ)= .898.

The number of posts analyzed with a total of n=142 are as follows: Fratelli d'Italia (N= 83; 58.5%), Ignazio La Russa (n= 38; 26.8%), Giorgia Meloni (n=12; 8.5%), Vox (n=4; 2.8%), Javier Ortega (n=3; 2.2%) and Santiago Abascal (n=2; 1.4%). The disproportion between the messages on memory in Spain and Italy is notorious: in Spain they only reach 6.3% of the total, as shown in table 1. Therefore, the answer to the first research question (RQ1) is clear: the discourse on democratic memory is more recurrent in Instagram accounts associated with the Italian far-right than with the Spanish far-right. This absolute result must be qualified, due to the fact that FdI governs in Italy, with a preponderant position in politics that reaches especially the premier Giorgia Meloni as head of state authority, while in Spain, Vox remains in the opposition in the Spanish government, although in various autonomous regions and municipalities it has reached positions in government thanks to its coalitions with the Popular Party. Public exposure and political accountability influence the issuance of memory-related messages, as well as other controversial and populist issues common in the agenda of far-right parties. In this regard, it was already noticed that the ruling party in Poland Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) led by Jarosław Kaczyński reduced its criticism of the management of the anti-COVID-19 vaccination, with respect to its counterparts in other European countries where the far-right were in opposition (Sánchez-Castillo et al., 2023).

Table 1. Descriptive analysis post.

	n	%
Fratelli d'Italia	83	58.5
I. Larussa	38	26.8
G. Meloni	12	8.5
Vox	4	2.8
J. Ortega	3	2.1
S. Abascal	2	1.4
Total	142	100

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

On the other hand, party accounts, which are more neutral than the personal accounts of politicians-which, although managed by communication professionals, have the emotional value provided by the leader's name-are much more involved in the publication of posts on memory. This is the answer to the following question (RQ2), regarding in which Instagram profiles more content on democratic memory is published, in the institutional ones or in those of political leaders. In Italy, the proportion is decreasing in a pyramidal scale, from 58.5% of Fratelli's account, to 26.8% for La Russa-president of the Senate- and 8.5% for the president of the Council of Ministers, Giorgia Meloni. In the profiles linked to the Spanish far-right, this gradation can also be seen from higher to lower between the party account, the personal account of the vice-president and the personal account of the leader, although it is qualified by the low numerical representativeness of the posts issued.

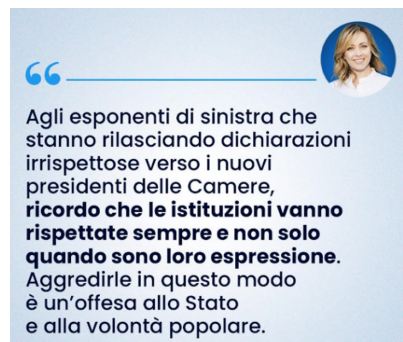
Regarding the possible variables that we have analyzed and that define the messages on democratic memory, we found a clear trend, with the construct "Disorientation" (D) obtaining the highest score (mean 3.18) together with the strategy of "attack on the opposition" (AO) (mean 2.89) and "Misrepresentation of History" (MH) the lowest (mean 1.56). It is possible to infer from the analysis of the content of the posts that most of them are produced in response to criticism and attacks by the opposition. Some of them are clearly made explicit as accusations of philo-fascism. This occurs, for example, in the criticisms for La Russa's acknowledged Mussolinian admiration, although in the Instagram response that is the responsibility of the far-right, repeating the accusation is routinely avoided: the strategy is to deny -introducing disorientation- and attack, but without falling into the enunciation of sin, so as not to magnify the accusation, see Figure 1. Thus, the answers sometimes turn into complex rhetoric that is difficult to understand, which, in order to get the message across, must be embedded in the time of a media news that exceeds the limits of the text available on the social network.

The analyzed posts also respond to accusations such as that of Enrico Letta - former Prime Minister of the center-left Democratic Party - comparing the political situation in Italy to the historical moment of La Marcia su Roma that brought Benito Mussolini to power and whose centenary was celebrated in October 2022 (Figure 2).

Therefore, with respect to the most frequently used discourse strategies referred to in RQ3, these are Disorientation (D) and Attack on the Opposition (AO), which are consistent with the atmosphere of contention that can be seen in the analysis of the content. In the case of Italy, Fratelli's coming to power coincided with an aggressive and highly symbolic and emotional citizen response, as when a mannequin representing Giorgia Meloni was hung upside down in a student demonstration in the streets of Bologna (Figure 3).

For an Italian, the visual reference to the well-known historical image of Mussolini hanging in the same position after his capture by the partisans in 1945, is obvious and clearly possesses a high emotional value. The action carried out by the demonstrators and the image disseminated as a result, had a high repercussion in Italian society and the country's media, although it did not merit any comment on the Instagram of Meloni herself, who had been in office as president for only 20 days. Both La Russa's and Fratelli's accounts issued only one angry response post, both ranked highest in D and AO on the discursive strategy scale. Table 2 shows the mean scores obtained on the Likert scale.

Figure 1: Response to accusations of philo-fascists.



Source:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CjtL3e5MR8p/>

Figure 2: Reply to Marcia's evocation of Rome.



Source:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CkQu2cjsQt1/>

Figure 3: Mannequin of Meloni upside down.



Source:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Ck0aFbTMrOe/>

Table 2. Discursive strategy means.

	Mean	Standard Dev.
(D) Disorientation	3,18	,845
(AO) Attack on the opposition	2,89	1,319
(HW) Historicist whitening	2,77	1,382
(FC) Fascism_francoism crimes	2,52	1,351
(DE) Denial	1,70	1,160
(MH) Misrepresentation of History	1,56	1,170
Overall mean: 2,436; n=142		

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In the center of the table appears the strategy of equating the crimes of fascism or francoism with those committed by radical leftist or communist groups. In the Spanish case, it is not numerically significant, but in the accounts of the Italian extremists it appears as a recurrent resource as well: among the cases of specific posts classified within this discursive strategy we find, for example, Meloni's response when she states that she is not afraid of the graffiti threatening her with "Meloni come Moro" in reference to the kidnapping and murder of the professor and Christian Democrat politician Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978. Victims of attacks such as Sergio Ramelli, a member of Fronte della Gioventù, a youth faction of the philo-fascist Movimento Sociale italiano, or the victims of the so-called "Tragedy of Foibe", where Tito's communist partisans murdered Italians by throwing their bodies into chasms in the last days of World War II, are also vindicated (Figure 4). At the same time, these messages are counterbalanced with posts reflecting Meloni's institutional visit to the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem -Yad Vashem-, or to the Wailing Wall, or commemorating the Giorno della Memoria, a celebration in which Jewish victims in Italy are vindicated.



Table 3 shows the ratings based on the Likert evaluation of the six players analyzed and the constructs that define their publications in relation to democratic memory. Both "Disorientation" (D) and "Misrepresentation of History" (MH) have obtained the highest averages (mean 3.10). The dimension "Denial" (DE) appears on very few occasions and has obtained a minimum level of importance (mean 1.95).

Table 3. Means per player.

	D	AO	HW	FC	DE	MH
Fratelli d'Italia	3,28	3,45	2,62	3,01	1,85	1,08
I. La Russa	3,36	1,89	2,94	1,76	1,31	2,10
G. Meloni	1,66	2	2,41	1,75	1,41	1
Vox	3	4	4,5	2,75	2	4,25
J.Ortega	3,33	2	3,66	2	2,66	4,33
S.Abascal	4	3	2,5	1,5	2,5	4,5
Total	3,10	2,72	3,10	2,12	1,95	2,87

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In the data collection process, the engagement level achieved by these messages focused on memory was also monitored. For this purpose, the "Communication Effectiveness Indicator" (CEI) was used, the result of which is the quotient obtained by relating the number of Likes plus comments divided by the number of followers, ensuring an objective and distributive proportion independent of the posts published (Sánchez-Castillo and Alonso, 2022) and indicating the engagement of each player analyzed. In this case, Vox vice-president Javier Ortega Smith is the one who obtains a more remarkable CEI (11.73), although his number of followers is relatively low, just over 200,000 Abascal, on the other hand, obtains only 2.16, although his followers on Instagram reach almost 900,000. Meloni obtains little engagement (1.40) but he does reach 2,100,000 followers on the social network. Therefore, the answer to RQ4, on which party or leader accounts show higher effectiveness around recall after applying the formula is Ortega Smith's, although Meloni compensates for his low effectiveness in Likes and comments with the communicative drag he gets from his follower success on Instagram. Table 4 shows the rest of the data in detail.

Table 4. Activity and effectiveness in communication. Engagement.

	Likes	Comments	Followers	Engagement ¹
Fratelli d'Italia	7118	700	332000	2.35
I. La Russa	2058	143	59700	3.68
G. Meloni	26902	2609	2100000	1.40
Vox	9924	229	701000	1.44
J. Ortega	23505	196	202000	11.73
S. Abascal	19022	308	892000	2.16

Note¹ [(Number of likes + number of comments) / number of followers] X 100

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Regarding the last research question RQ5, both historicist iconography and the image of leaders is little used in the posts on memory. Perhaps the intention to tiptoe around the subject in the case of Fratelli d'Italia makes them prefer on the one hand not to use historical images that bring a greater emotional charge, and on the other hand, not to use the image of the leader so as not to involve it so personally in the messages. As for the accounts that use less historical images, there is Meloni, with only 16.7%. In the three Italian accounts analyzed, the appearance of the leader's image is reduced, with Meloni's image reaching a maximum of 16.7%, while in the three Spanish accounts the use of Abascal's image is much higher, always above half of the posts. Table 5 shows the data in more detail.

Table 5. Visual Information.

	Historic images	The leader is included
Fratelli d'Italia	N=16; 48,5 %	N=10; 52,6 %
I. La Russa	N=11; 33,3 %	N=2; 10,5%
G. Meloni	N= 2; 6,1 %	N=2; 10,5 %
Vox	N=1; 3%	N=2; 10,5%
J. Ortega	N=2; 6,1%	N=2; 10,5 %
S. Abascal	N=1; 3%	N=1; 5,3%
Total	N= 33; 100%	N= 19; 100%

Historical images: $X^2= 5,697$ (5); $p= ,337$
 The leader is included: $X^2= 16,691$ (5); $p= ,005$

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

European extreme right-wing parties are difficult to classify, although authors such as Cas Mudde characterize them by the coincidence in the use of authoritarian, populist and nativist discourses (2007). Unlike center-right parties, they share a central ideological focus on nationalism (Mudde, 2002), with which they justify the exclusion of national, ethnic or sexual minority groups (Krämer, 2014). The far right is combined with populism "because nationalism resonates with popular centrism and the exclusion of out-groups, which are defining characteristics of this weak ideology" (Ernst et al., 2019). The advance of these parties destroys the values of liberal democracy by promoting intolerance. Previous research focused on legislative, economic, demographic (Givens, 2005) and media factors (Aalberg et al., 2017) that manage to position the popularity of these parties. In this research we have focused on the analysis of two European countries, Spain and Italy, which have shared a long period of dictatorship, although in very different circumstances that have been established in a long academic tradition by different authors (Linz, 1978; Petersen, 1975; Payne, 1986). The role that Instagram has in the permanence of that discourse is discussed, and whether the memory of that non-democratic period constitutes an explanatory variable for achieving greater success on Instagram and by extension a greater virality of those theses.

The first evident conclusion of the research carried out in this article is that the Italian far-right has included the reference to the memory of fascism and its derived subthemes among the posts they broadcast on the Instagram social network to a much greater extent than the Spanish one. This comparative statement must be qualified, taking into account the very different circumstances regarding the electoral success of the two political options, and consequently their institutional influence in the respective governments: moreover, the relative abundance of posts in Italy is conditioned by the forced response to the accusations of philo-fascism received by those of the FdI. Responses that, moreover, as mentioned above, usually use the resource of not explicitly stating the accusation in order not to publicly magnify a link with which they are clearly not comfortable.

As a limitation to this study, it should be noted the scarce presence of messages in the accounts corresponding to the Spanish extreme right, which was detected after the first approach to the messages and which limits the scope of some of the conclusions. On the other hand, the finding of this limited use of memory at least in the accounts analyzed in Instagram encourages further exploration and analysis in other accounts that are not as institutional as those chosen for this study, perhaps of influencers linked to the extreme right and that may include memory more regularly in the list of topics that make up their agenda setting.

The scarce use of historical images and that of the leader in the posts is also one of the conclusions of our study. The explanation can be found in the intention to go unnoticed that is noticeable in terms of the posts issued on memory: the emotional involvement is better not to highlight it in this type of messages.

Knowing how and under what conditions the discourse is constructed on Instagram can help to elaborate political and communicative formulas to counteract the effects of this populism. This study is a step forward in understanding how extreme right-wing messages can go viral on Instagram. One of the usual discursive resources used by ultra-rightists is the comparison between the crimes of fascism and those committed by radical leftist or communist groups. As mentioned above, in the Spanish case it is not numerically significant, but in the Italian accounts it is recurrent and is used as a resource of victimization, including in the messages, for example, responses to a simple graffiti in which Meloni is put in the target, recalling the assassination of Aldo Moro. Fratelli hardly responds when symbolically related to Mussolini with the figure of the premier hanging upside down exposed in the streets of Bologna, in another example of victimization strategy, but instead they do respond when the threat of the left equates Meloni with the Christian Democrat politician. The vindication and memory of tragedies and assassinations that were the responsibility of the left, serves as a strategy of minimization of those committed by the fascists. Everything points to the fact that strategies based on attacking the opposition, disorientation and equating the crimes of fascism with those committed by the radical left are useful discursive tools for the purposes of the far-right: the popularization of their narratives, especially among the younger generations.

"Which party or leader accounts show higher effectiveness around recall after applying the formula is Ortega Smith's."

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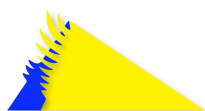
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